

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter pertains to the Foster/Adopt STARs process which is based on Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE program for the pre-service training, assessment, and selection of prospective foster parents and adoptive parents. Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE was developed by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) in collaboration with several other states including Missouri.

- 2.1 Mandate and Rationale
- 2.2 Working With Prospective Foster/Adoptive Parents
 - 2.2.1 At-Home Consultation Meeting
 - 2.2.2 Mutual Assessment Process
 - 2.2.3 Family Assessment

Attachment A: STARs Training Objectives

Attachment B: Pre-Service and In-Service Training; STARs Competencies

Attachment C: Foster Parent Training

Attachment D: Guidelines For Award of Credit for Non-Agency Training

2.1 MANDATE AND RATIONALE

Mandate and Rationale that governs licensure of foster home, residential care or child placing agency:

- 1) Section 210.486, RSMo, specifies that:
 - a) No person shall operate or maintain a foster home, residential care facility, or child placing agency without having in full force and effect a valid license issued by the Division or the Department of Health as provided in Section 210.484.
 - b) The Division or the Department of Health as provided in Section 210.484 shall conduct an investigation of all applicants and such investigations shall include examination of the physical facility and of persons responsible for the care of, planning, and services for the children being served.
- 2) Rule 13 CSR 40.010 - 13 CSR 40-60.060 addresses procedures for approval, denial, or revocation of foster family home licenses.
- 3) Section 453.070, RSMo, specifies that:
 - a) No decree for adoption of a minor child under eighteen years of age shall be entered nor shall transfer of custody of such child to petitioners occur until a full investigation has been made. A report of the findings of the investigation

shall include the physical, mental, racial and ethnic conditions and antecedents of the child and whether the petitioner(s) is suitable for the child.

- b) The court may appoint the Children's Division or other individuals/agencies to conduct the investigation. The result of the investigation must be submitted to the court in a written report within ninety (90) days of the request.

2.2 WORKING WITH PROSPECTIVE FOSTER/ADOPTIVE PARENTS

The way the Children's Service Worker responds to individuals who inquire about becoming foster parents or adoptive parents is critical to the process of developing and supporting foster parents and adoptive parents as essential resources. It can set the tone, both attitudinally and behaviorally, for future contacts.

Many prospective foster parents and adoptive parents have given considerable thought to making this first call. Typically, it is not a spontaneous decision precipitated by viewing a recruitment poster or reading a newspaper story. Research indicates that individuals interested in fostering have thought about it for months and, sometimes, years. Individuals calling about adoption, may have spent years of emotional and financial investment dealing with infertility issues.

The Children's Service Worker who accepts the inquiry from a prospective foster family or adoptive family should do the following:

- a) Introduce self by name and title;
- b) Respond to the caller's stated interest, educate the caller about the program;
- c) Use the inquiry worksheet to give and get information;
- d) Assess the caller's knowledge of fostering and adopting to determine the information they and the Division need at this point in the licensing/certification process;
- e) Give information about the fostering or adoption program, addressing the questions/concerns raised by the caller including:
 - Goals and challenges of the family foster care and adoption programs;
 - Importance of foster parents and adoptive parents;
 - Description of children needing foster families and adoptive families;
 - Specific requirements for fostering or adopting;

- Competencies for fostering or adopting;
 - Importance of participating in the resource family's development process; and
 - Steps in the licensing/certification process.
- f) Conclude inquiry call, clarifying next steps;
- g) Mail to caller either a CW-101, Application for Foster Home License, or a CW-102, Application to Adopt a Child; and
- h) Schedule an at-home consultation meeting within ten days of the inquiry.

NOTE: Indicate a follow-up contact with callers who choose not to receive an information packet or schedule an at-home family consultation meeting at this time, but who appear to have the ability to foster or adopt.

2.2.1 At-Home Consultation Meeting

The first at-home family consultation meeting is an extension of the first telephone inquiry response. During this meeting the Children's Service Worker continues to provide the family with more specific information about what is involved in the job of being a foster parent or adoptive parent, the process by which the Division carries out the mutual assessment, and selection outcomes. The worker also begins more in-depth discussion with the family about their expectations and motivation for considering this job at this time. During this interview the worker may identify, through conversations or review of the application, issues that may raise preliminary questions about the family's willingness or ability to become foster parents or adoptive parents. Depending on the nature of these issues, the worker may need to explore these issues with the family during this meeting. During this meeting the worker must explain the licensing requirements including the house assessment, the Family Care Safety Registry and child abuse/neglect and criminal background checks with the family, and explain which are non-negotiable and which are subject to more subjective assessment criteria.

At the end of this meeting, the family and Children's Service Worker should both have additional information that will allow them to make a mutual decision about the next steps in the process.

During the at-home consultation meeting the Children's Service Worker must do the following:

- a) Introduce self;

- b) Explain the purpose of the at-home consultation meeting;
- c) Ask family about impressions so far and answer any questions; and
- d) Explain the mutual assessment process.
- e) Initiate necessary paperwork for the background checks, including child abuse/neglect, Family Care Safety Registry, Fingerprinting, and CaseNet.

Related Subject: Attachment B, of this chapter, Foster/Adopt STARS Training Overview.

The Children's Service Worker should explain the potential outcomes of the mutual assessment process, which are:

- a) The Division and the family make a mutual decision to select the family into the program;
- b) The Division and the family make a mutual decision to select the family out of the program;
- c) The Division may feel that the family has the skills to become a foster parent or adoptive parent, but the family is not willing or does not feel it has the skills to take on the job and the family makes a decision to select-out of the program; or
- d) The family is willing to become a foster parent or adoptive parent and feels they have the ability to take on the job, but the Division disagrees and does not invite the family to select-in to the program.

The Children's Service Worker should explain that the focus of the training is to help the participants understand the skills involved in being a foster or adoptive parent. Only when the family understands what skills are needed will they have the information necessary to make an informed decision about whether they are willing or able to do the job.

Related Subject: Attachment B, of this chapter, Foster/Adopt STARS Training Overview.

- Explain the role and focus of the consultation meetings in the mutual assessment process, which are as follows:

- a) Clarifying the family's changing understanding of what the job of being a foster parent or adoptive parent entails as they learn more about the role in the pre-service training;
 - b) "Checking in" with the family to determine if they are still willing to take on the job as they expand their understanding of its complexities; and
 - c) Carrying out a dialogue with the family about their history, their current family system and networks, and how becoming a foster parent or adoptive parent will change the family system. This discussion will focus on understanding strengths and needs in regard to the family's willingness and ability to be foster parents or adoptive parents.
- Introduce the idea of the five competencies necessary for foster and adoptive parenting which are:
 - a) Protecting and nurturing;
 - b) Meeting developmental needs and addressing developmental delays;
 - c) Supporting relationships between children and their families;
 - d) Connecting children to lifetime relationships; and
 - e) Working as a member of a professional team.
 - Inform the family about the non-negotiable licensing requirements.
 - Review the paperwork (application) the family has provided or assist the family to complete the paperwork.
 - Watch for responses to sensitive issues, i.e., motivation, expectations, etc.
 - Begin the mutual assessment by introducing the "Competencies and Expectations Worksheet."
 - This Worksheet is a preliminary information gathering tool that will help prospective foster parents or adoptive parents begin a mutual assessment of their expectations, skills and training needs.
 - The Children's Service Worker should inspect the house by walking from room to room to ensure compliance with "Physical Standards for a Foster Home."
 - Explain the requirements for CA/N and background checks.

- Determine the next steps.

2.2.2 Mutual Assessment Process

The Mutual Assessment Process includes the integrated functions of preparation and assessment and should lead to a final decision about the willingness and ability of the applicants for fostering and adopting. The process includes the applicant's participation in nine pre-service training sessions, a series of meetings between the Children's Service Worker and applicants, supplemental information obtained through meetings, the preparation program, references, and other licensing or approval checks.

The selection of prospective foster parents and adoptive parents has been based on the concepts of:

- a) Assessing strengths and needs;
- b) Selecting families in; and
- c) Mutual assessment.

Each prospective foster family or adoptive family should have been encouraged to participate in an open and honest assessment of their strengths in fostering or adopting, as well as their needs for support. Their strengths should be identified so they can be matched with the needs of a specific child to be placed. The needs should be identified so it can be determined if the Division can provide the supports required to meet those needs.

As a result of this process, the final decision should be made to reflect the family's ability and willingness to foster or adopt. The decision should be based on whether the prospective foster parent or adoptive parent:

- a) Has the potential for meeting the needs of the children and their families served by the Division;
- b) Has the personal commitment necessary to provide the required continuity of care throughout the child's need for family foster care or adoption;
- c) Has sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of particular children as these change in the course of the child's development;
- d) Can identify with the Division's foster care and adoption program goals, work within its policies, share responsibility with the agency, and benefit from assistance and training opportunities;

- e) Can accept and support the child's relationship with parents and kin;
and
- f) Can work within the limitations of the Division and its supports
available for foster families and adoptive families.

2.2.3 Family Assessment

The first meeting for the purpose of beginning the Family Assessment is scheduled between the third and fourth training sessions. Additional meetings needed to assess the family should be held between the fifth and sixth sessions and again after the ninth Family Resource Development training session.

The Family Assessment is completed utilizing the following tools:

- a) Genogram;
- b) Ecomap;
- c) Loss History Worksheet;
- d) Pathways Through the Grieving Process; and
- e) History and Current Functioning of Prospective Family.

It is at the final at-home consultation that the family and the Children's Service Worker conclude their mutual assessment leading to a decision. The family must decide if they wish to foster or adopt. The worker must decide if this family has the skills, willingness, and resources to foster or adopt available children. The preceding tasks have allowed the worker and families to accumulate assessment information that must now be organized and assimilated into a clear and defensible decision. The worker must complete all of the following steps either before or during the final at-home consultation visit.

The Children's Service Worker must be sure that all required data has been collected before scheduling the final at-home consultation, including the following:

- a) Application;
- b) References;
- c) Health/Psychological Reports;

- d) Fingerprinting report;
- e) CA/N check;
- f) Documentation of CaseNet review;
- g) Family Care Safety Registry report;
- h) Documentation that family has attended all training sessions; and
- i) Trainer's observations of the family.

The Family Assessment Summary is a composite of information collected through the Family Assessment. Basically, the strengths and needs of the family are organized according to the five competency categories. Each statement made in the Summary must be stated in behavioral terms and referenced. In other words, the Children's Service Worker must list where, when, or in what document he/she read, observed, or been told about the strength or need.

To prepare for writing the "Family Assessment Summary" the Children's Service Worker should review the following:

- a) Required forms listed above;
- b) Ecomap and genogram;
- c) Family Resource Development Connections (assignments completed between training sessions);
- d) Family Assessment Worksheet; and
- e) References.

Having reviewed the pertinent documents listed above the Children's Service Worker can now make a final decision to:

- a) Invite the family to select-in to the foster care or adoption program;
- b) Invite the family to select-in with a plan, i.e., correction of physical/tangible deficiency, i.e., smoke detector, furniture, etc.;
- c) Counsel the family out of providing family foster care or adoptive care.

The family can decide to select-out and not participate as foster parents or adoptive parents.

Prepare Family Assessment (See 2.2.3 of this chapter);

Related Subject: Chapter 3, of this section, Resource Family Assessment and Licensing Process.

Discuss recommendations with supervisor. A supervisor must approve the final decision and recommendation. The Children's Service Worker should meet with the supervisor to share any borderline decisions and all decisions to counsel a family out of the program.

Make phone call and send confirming letter to set up consultation;

Begin at-home consultation by establishing an agenda. The agenda will vary with each family, but should generally include:

- a) Discussion of the family's final decision regarding participation in the foster care or adoption program;
- b) Discussion of the Division's final decision;
- c) Negotiation of a mutual decision;
- d) Review of the Family Assessment Summary;
- e) Introduction of the "Family Development Plan" for families invited to select-in the family foster care program;
- f) Explanation of the next steps if the family disagrees with the Division's decision to counsel the family out of the program.
- g) Plan for the meeting to complete the "Family Development Plan."

Initiate a collaborative process for discussing the Family Assessment Summary;

The Family Assessment Summary is used as a tool to facilitate a process in which a mutual decision, not a compromise, is reached. The Children's Service Worker presents the Summary in order to work for agreement on areas in which the family is competent and areas that need support.

The Children's Service Worker relates all comments, positive and negative, to the strengths and needs identified with each of the five competencies.

To create a collaborative environment the Children's Service Worker should use interviewing and relationship techniques like:

- a) Making clear statements about strengths and needs documented in materials generated by the mutual assessment process or observed through previous meetings;
- b) Avoiding biased or inflammatory words, for example, "your answer was wrong" or "your discipline style is bad";
- c) Reminding applicants of previous conversations where strengths and concerns were shared so that this final at-home consultation brings no surprises;
- d) Encouraging families to share their feelings and the results of their family discussion by using open ended questions and non-verbal displays of interest in what is being said;
- e) Communicating respect for the family, regardless of the decision made, by hearing their feelings and recognizing their interest and commitment; and
- f) Allowing an appropriate amount of anger from families disappointed with the final decision by not taking it personally or reacting unprofessionally.

Present the Final Agency Decision;

Present placement recommendation to the families who have been invited to select-in;

The Children's Service Worker and family should discuss the number, the age range, and the kinds of children they could most safely and successfully parent and the supports the Division would need to provide. This discussion should be based on the family's strengths in the five competencies and supports they need from the Division.

Begin the process for assessing learning needs and building a family development plan with the family invited to select-in;

Schedule the consultation meeting to complete the family development plan and conclude consultation with next steps for foster families and adoptive families who have been selected-in.

At the end of the Mutual Assessment process (training and family assessment) the family and Children's Service Worker will decide whether to select-in or select-out the foster parent or adoptive parent applicant.

When the Children's Service Worker and family decide to select-in to the program, the worker should complete the following tasks:

- a) Notify family in person and in writing that they have been selected in;
and
- b) Complete/process SS-60.

When the Children's Service Worker and/or family decide to select-out, the worker should complete the following tasks:

- a) Recommend license denial using CS-20 - Foster Home Licensing Action Form, through supervisory line to the Area Director;
- b) Include a summary of the licensing rules on which the decision is based;
- c) When an action is CA/N related, submit a copy of the form CA/N 4;
- d) Submit a copy of the Family Assessment Summary to Area Director;
and
- e) If the decision to deny a license is supported by the Area Director, notify the applicant in person and by registered letter. The notice should include information regarding how to request a fair hearing.

MEMORANDA HISTORY: CD04-79